

We Go Together

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We Go Together by alyeskagrace

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Summary:

A Grease AU!Losers fic.

Big Bill Denbrough, the Losers' unparalleled, unfailing leader, had decided about a month ago that he was obsessed with Grease. Out of absolutely nowhere, he was stealing Richie's leather jackets whenever the taller boy wasn't wearing them himself and playing "Greased Lightnin'" unironically for the whole group as they piled up in Silver on their way home from school. After only a week, Bev was

requesting him to play “Look at Me I’m Sandra Dee,” and Stan was singing along to “Summer Nights” with him and laughing along. Ben hummed “You’re the One That I Want” while he walked from class to class.

That was weeks ago, and since then, Eddie’s whole life had become one big 1950’s musical. It wasn’t that he didn’t like Grease, specifically. Eddie didn’t like musicals. He didn’t like the unnecessary falsetto riffs or the expository song lyrics. If he had to be in a musical, at least it was Grease instead of something else, but he wasn’t going to like it. He wasn’t going to like a musical. That wasn’t Eddie.

1. April 1st, 1994

Derry High School was always anxiously quiet, in a way. Instead of screaming, the walls simply *hummed* with teenage electricity in a way that never failed to make Eddie feel uncomfortable. The long, empty hallways between classes were upsetting enough, but worse was when he had to just sit and feel the nervous vibration of the whole school: a thousand tiny feet tapping under their seats. He felt (a bit too much for his liking) like Richie as he too tapped the ends of his fingers against his notebook, watching the clock above Dr. Torrence's desk tick by minutes slower than Eddie had ever thought possible.

Spending his free period in the principal's office running errands and signing kids out of classes was fun in his sophomore year, but now, when Eddie was a senior and bound to turn eighteen in just 22 days, waiting for Daniel Torrence to give him orders for an hour each day seemed a lot less appealing. *I can't quit*, Eddie told himself on the days when the silence of Torrence's office drove him to think drastically. *All the boys would be expelled within the week*. And maybe that was an exaggeration, but it wasn't a large one. Bill, Richie, and Bev had called in favors more than 3 times each, and last week Eddie had had to bail Ben and Mike out of detention so they could make it to their auditions on time.

Eddie's fingers drummed even faster against the cardboard cover of his notebook. *Their fucking auditions*.

Big Bill Denbrough, their unparallelled, unfailing leader, had decided about a month ago that he was obsessed with *Grease*. Out of absolutely nowhere, Bill was stealing Richie's leather jackets whenever he wasn't wearing them himself and playing "Greased Lightnin'" unironically for the whole group as they piled up in Silver (his absolutely *bitchin'*, as Bev called it, truck) on their way home from school. If Bev sat in Ben's lap, Bill could pull up the console between the driver's seat and Stan could climb up between him and Richie while Mike and Eddie sat on either side of Ben and Bev. It was hot and uncomfortable and awkward, and the music only made it worse, but no one would tell Bill that, especially not Eddie. You just *didn't* say those things to Bill. No one did. Whatever Bill liked, the

Losers all liked, period.

After a week, Bev was requesting him to play “Look at Me I’m Sandra Dee,” and Stan was singing along to “Summer Nights” with him and laughing along. Mike could do a very soulful rendition of “Beauty School Dropout” that made everyone like it a bit more. Ben hummed “You’re the One That I Want” while he walked from class to class. Richie perfected Danny’s move at the drive-in where he grabs Sandy’s chest and performed it on everyone but Bev. Right before Eddie’s eyes, he watched each of his best friends get swallowed up and spit out by Bill’s absolute confidence that he sounded just right saying, “A hickey from Kenickie is like a Hallmark card.” He’d stop and wink here. “When you care enough to send the very best.”

That was weeks ago, and since then, Eddie’s whole life had become one big 1950’s musical. Richie had given himself a stick-and-poke tattoo on his inner arm (while Eddie and Stan held each other and nervously winced each time he drew blood) that clearly said “T-Birds” if you didn’t mistake it for a rogue group of freckles. Bev started chewing gum constantly, blowing bubbles between her sentences. Bill and Stan convinced Ben to slick his hair back, and Eddie wanted to tell him he thought it looked ridiculous but Ben seemed to like it so much that he couldn’t.

Mike had been the one to find out about the play, though. He was walking a girl he liked (a short girl with mousy brown hair and a round face) to class when he passed the bulletin and came to an abrupt stop. “Mike?” The girl had called. “What’s wrong?” But what she didn’t understand was that *nothing* was wrong, nothing at all, and Mike had barely been able to choke out a “see you in algebra” before he took off towards the cafeteria, his new combat boots pounding on the tile floors. When he had gotten to the Losers’ table, it took him six tries to finally get it out. The school’s play this year was *fucking Grease*. Auditions were in a week. Eddie faked a smile as everyone else cheered and chattered about who should be who.

It was that Eddie didn’t like *Grease*, specifically. Eddie didn’t like musicals. He didn’t like the unnecessary falsetto riffs or the expository song lyrics. If he was going to like a musical, *Grease* would be a good one to get into, but he wasn’t going to like a musical. That wasn’t Eddie. Tough luck, Big Bill.

Still, he had written Ben and Mike their excuses and walked with them from detention to the drama room, his breath hitching in his throat. Bill had convinced Eddie to audition himself, somehow, but Eddie had made it very clear that he would *not* sing. Bill agreed, satisfied enough, and offered up that he should play Tom, Sandy's popular boyfriend, since he didn't have any singing parts. Eddie reluctantly agreed. He read a few lines from the script, the theater director smiled and told him he did great, and that was the end of it.

Except it wasn't. Because today, the 1st of April, 1994, was the day that the parts were announced.

There was a tap on the door of Dr. Torrence's office. Eddie looked up and saw Richie waving wildly on the other side of the glass window, Bill and Stan laughing behind him. Eddie's eyes darted around the room, trying to be sure that Torrence himself hadn't heard them, wherever he was, but the bell rang just then. Eddie hopped out of his seat with a jolt, clutching his notebook to his chest. "See you Monday, Dr. Torrence!" The principal called back a similar goodbye. Eddie pushed open the door and closed it quickly behind him. "I'm not bailing you guys out next time you get caught skipping, assholes," He said, shoving Richie's arm, as Bill began leading them toward the drama room.

"What, you aren't excited, Eddie? This could be our big break!" Stan joked, smiling down at the still shorter boy after all these years. Richie laughed along.

"My big break, you mean. No way you fuckers got the part."

Everyone laughed, mostly because he was probably right. Stan looked like the Putzie from the movie, but he had stuttered over one of his lines in the audition. Bill himself hadn't stuttered even once during his read for Kenickie, but his voice had cracked when he sang "We Go Together." Mike had flubbed his delivery on one of Sonny's best lines ("Can she get me a friend?"), and Ben had gotten so nervous when he read with the girl who was supposed to be the Frenchie to his Doody (a redhead like they all knew he liked with wide, big brown eyes) that he totally forgot his leading line. Only Bev and Richie had done any good - Richie's spot-on Danny and Bev's version of "There Are Worse Things I Could Do" winning the director

over from the beginning, and the others were pretty much just tagging along for the fun of it.

They turned down the drama hall and saw Ben, Bev, and Mike just a few feet ahead of them, Mike's arms around the other two as they hurried to join the small crowd already waiting outside Miss McDonald's classroom. Both Ben and Bev were just shorter than him, and he always felt more comfortable to walk with his arms resting across either of them, leading in the absence of Bill. Bill himself took off running the minute he saw them, excitement eclipsing the need to look cool in Richie's borrowed jacket and boots, grabbing Bev around the waist and picking her up, moving her to the side as he ducked under Mike's arm. Bev cursed at him and slapped his shoulder. "Greased lightnin', boys. No matter who gets what, we're partying like T-Birds tonight!"

Eddie would have hated the cheesiness of it if it wasn't Bill, but somehow, like everything else he did, Bill pulled it off, looking effortlessly cool with his hair pushed back from his face as he smiled at the other boys. Stan, Richie, and Eddie joined the rest of them. Bev smiled over her shoulder at Richie. "How you feelin', Danny?"

The trashmouth couldn't hold back his grin. "Fuckin' fantastic, Rizz. Thanks for asking!"

The whole group them laughed, and Eddie and Stan fell behind the rest as they integrated themselves into the group of mostly girls who were all fighting past each other to see the list. Richie, the tallest and currently most confident of all of them, took lead and made his way to the front, Bill following close behind and Bev with her hand around Bill's arm as she fought through herself. "Okay, okay!" Richie called once he got close enough to read the paper, his thick glasses fogging up from the proximity to so many girls. Eddie didn't have to listen to his next sentence to know he got the part.

Bev was the next of them to speak. "Who's Ivy Evans?"

A just barely blonde girl next to Stan and Eddie raised her hand. She stood with another girl named Sara that Bev invited to the Losers' parties sometimes. "Me? Oh my God, did I get something?"

“Course you did, Sandra Dee,” someone else sneered to Eddie’s left, but the Ivy girl’s smile didn’t falter. She and the girl next to her chatted as Bill urged Richie to go on with the list, too nervous to read it aloud himself.

“Kenickie goes to... our very own Big Bill Denbrough!”

The Losers cheered amongst themselves.

“Rizzo is... I mean clearly it’s Bev, right?”

Bev turned red and backed away a bit, no longer as nervous to read the list. “Beep, beep, Rich,” She said to him, and Eddie caught himself smiling.

“Jamie Carson, I am pleased to tell you that you have won the part of Frenchie!” A dark-haired girl jumped in place behind him, her friends pulling her into a hug. “And- Uh- No, Bevvie, you read this one.”

Bev leaned forward just for a second and then turned on her heels, smiling back at Sara. “You got it, Marty!” The other girl smiled and grabbed Bev around the shoulders, hugging her. Ivy joined in, wrapping her arms around both of them and laughing. Eddie was too busy watching them to even notice as Richie called out the rest of the Losers’ names.

“Ben, dude! Our very own Howdy Doody!” Richie called behind him. Ben beamed at Mike as he rubbed his shoulders. “And introducing... Mike Hanlon as Sonny!” Mike erupted into laughter, collapsing back onto Stan, who was practically bouncing out of his shoes.

“What about me, Richie?” He asked, anxiety clear in his throat.

Richie turned fully around now, making his way back to his friends. “What about you, Putz?” Stan almost squealed.

Eddie stood beside him still, smiling because all his friends were, feeling a strange sense of security in the fact that Richie hadn’t yelled his name, thinking that he was out of the woods. Richie clapped a hand over his shoulder. “And we, my dearest Tom, get to share *her*,”

Richie said, nodding to Ivy as she bounced around with Bev and Sara. Eddie would have called Richie out for being such a sleazebag, but it was just now that he realized she was a very pretty girl, all freckles and eyelashes. She had hair like the red Heather from Bev's favorite movie and wore a soft pink dress with Keds. She had butterfly clips pulling back her bangs. She looked over and caught his eye, and all of a sudden he saw it. *Sandra Dee*, he thought, *From all those old movies Mommy used to watch mindlessly during dinner*. This girl looked just like her, had that old fashioned kind of face that made him think of naked women in satin bathrobes and warm summer nights. When Eddie finally tore his eyes from her, Richie was grinning even wider down at him, humming along to a part of a song Eddie didn't recognize for a quick moment.

“Won’t come across. Even Rock Hudson lost his heart to Doris Day...”

2. Donny, 1959-69

Richie Tozier was a Grade-A, All-American idiot, and if anyone knew this better than the rest of them, it was Bill Denbrough.

“The boys are back!” Richie had screamed as he climbed up into Silver after they had all dropped the other Losers off at Stan’s, whose parents were out of town and who swore that it would be okay if it was just the group of them and a few guests. (“*Not g-guests,*” Bill had corrected him. “*Girls!*” Stan had faked a smile, clearly unconvinced.) The truth was: Bill couldn’t remember a time the boys had ever left, not for a single period since kindergarten in 1981, not for more than a week or so. Bill and Richie just couldn’t quite exist without each other, especially not on a night like tonight - a *party* night. Richie needed Bill to use his cousin’s old ID to buy drinks and cigarettes, and Bill needed Richie to get all their pot from his questionable punk friends on the other side of town. They were the perfect co-dependent co-ed duo. Even if Richie was a complete fucking idiot most of the time.

Richie leaned forward to turn down the radio halfway through their ride to the liquor store. “So, you’re gonna have to kiss Bev sober again, huh, Billy?”

Bill tightened his hands on the steering wheel and tried to keep from rolling his eyes. *Complete fucking Grade-A, All-American idiot.* “G-guess so,” He said shortly, his jaw unmoving.

“First time since eighth grade, isn’t it?”

Bill tried to force out a laugh. “Sometimes I forget why we call you Trashmouth, you know,” He said amicably, turning the radio back up a bit and trying to close the subject. “B-bu-but then you spew all this bullshit an-and I remember.” The last syllable he spoke came out with a lot of force as he fought through the remnants of his old stutter, but Richie wouldn’t say anything about that. When they were younger, and it was worse, Richie used to give Bill tongue twisters to do whenever he fucked up. It sounded mean, and Stan never liked it, but it worked pretty well. Now, he could fight against it pretty well, only really getting caught up on his g’s and b’s sometimes, and only

when he couldn't be damned enough to focus so hard on his own tongue.

Richie wasn't giving up that easy though. "But like isn't that weird?" He said, turning the radio back down. "Like, when you guys were together she didn't even have tits yet, and now you get to put your tongue down her throat in front of all of Derry High."

Bill cleared his throat. "Beverly is my *friend*, asshole, so yeah, it'll-"

"Friends don't make out every time they drink," Richie said simply, cutting him off.

Bill frowned at the road ahead of them. "Beep, beep, Richie," he said definitively.

"You can't do that!" Richie protested, slamming his hand down on the seat beside him.

Bill shrugged. "W-well, I just did. So..."

And that quieted him for a bit.

"Friends don't make out every time they drink," Richie muttered after a while, smiling out the window to his right.

"Friends also don't commit vehicular homicide, but I'm ab-b-out to kick you out and run you over if you don't shut up, Richie."

"I'm just saying, if I were you-"

"And if- if I- if I were *you*, Richie-"

"I would make my move while I can-"

"I would shut my mouth before-"

"Before she shacks up with Ben."

Bill tried, really *fucking tried*, to not be annoyed by that. Richie didn't see his knuckles turn white on the steering wheel and continued as Bill sat silent and still beside him. "Because our Benny's

been shaping up lately, Billy, and you know he likes her. If you don't do anything-"

Bill took a sharp left into the liquor store parking lot. Richie, who hadn't been wearing a seatbelt, tumbled in a tangle of limbs and hair across the console between he and Bill. "What the fuck, Bill?" He screamed as Bill pulled into a spot and slammed on brakes, causing Richie to once again be tossed around the truck.

"Shut up about her, Tozier," Bill said once he had let Richie bitch for a while, rubbing his elbows and forehead like he had actually been hurt inside the truck cab. "I'm serious. I d-don't wanna talk about her tonight. I just wanna get fucked up, okay?"

"I just don't want you to miss-"

Bill smiled at him, raising a single hand that silenced the rambling boy immediately. "I ain't missing a thing, Zuko," He said and abruptly shut the door behind him as he shoved Joseph Michael Denbrough's outdated ID in his left pocket and popped the collar of his jacket, entering the store with a kind of confidence even a boy like Richie envied.

Back at the house, Stan was leaning against the corner of his dining table as Beverly and Eddie scuttled around the house locking doors and moving chairs, making room for a dancefloor while still leaving the boys somewhere to sit. Mike and Ben sat behind him at the table, sipping cream sodas out of red plastic cups. Stan drank from his own bottled root beer, a sweet substitute to what Bill and Richie had been sent to pick up, for a while before turning back to them. "You guys want some jackets and stuff? My dad has some old stuff from high school we can wear if you guys promise not to mess it up." Ben and Mike both nodded excitedly. "And don't tell Bill and Rich, because they'll mess it up no matter what," He added at the last moment, just as Bev and Eddie came back into the main room.

"Oh, yes! Can I do your hair?" She seemed to ask all of them, but they all knew she was mostly asking Ben. Ben nodded back to her, and Eddie looked to Stan. Stan smiled back, clearly pleased with

himself for contributing to the group so well. Mike stood first, followed by Ben, and they all ventured into Stan's garage to find their hidden gems.

Bev tangled her fingers in Ben's hair from behind him as the boys crowded around the boxes of old clothes stacked neatly and labeled by the year. Stan stood in the middle of them, picking through each one, until he got to the right one. "DONNY, 1959-69," it read in scribbled letters across the top, and when Stan opened it up there was so much dust that he stepped back and Eddie started coughing immediately. Mike rubbed his back with one hand as Stan gently pulled out a black bomber jacket. "For you, Benjamin," He said simply, tossing it through the air to Ben, who shrugged it on quickly.

"Nice," he mumbled under his breath as he turned to show Bev. "What do you think?"

Beverly smiled back. "Bitchin'," She said simply, and they all pretended not to notice how red Ben turned after that.

Mike was handed the next one, and shrugged it on quickly, liking the way his arms felt in the tough material. Stan grabbed the last leather one for himself, pulling it onto himself effortlessly (the others imagined he was much like his father was at this age, as the jacket fit perfectly), but then he reached back in once more and pulled something else out. "And for you, Eddie," He said, smiling, sincere as ever, and handed him a jean jacket littered with patches like the cool girls wore at school. It was atrocious, but it wasn't greaser attire, more 1969 Woodstock, and that made Eddie take it from him.

Eddie didn't *want* to wear it, but Bev was smiling over at him so wide, and Mike patted his back the way Richie would have if he were here, and Stan looked so damn *sweet*, no idea that he was making Eddie look so much like a *girl*, so Eddie shrugged it on shyly, not willing to admit to himself now that it felt nice on his shoulders. The dust on the sleeves made him sneeze. Stan and the others laughed. "You look great, Eddie."

"Is this... Do you think they're... Oh now, where..." echoed down the stairs into the garage where they all stood, and Stan had just crawled out from behind all the boxes when Ivy Evans and Sara

Hopkins appeared in the doorway, cupcakes and chips in each of their arms. Sara had on jeans and a plain red t-shirt. Ivy wore another pink dress, pinker than the one she wore before, and shoes that made her a few inches taller. “Oh, there you guys are,” Sara called, and Ivy laughed behind her, the sound almost like bells, like Tinkerbell’s laughter (although Eddie *for sure didn’t like Peter Pan*).

The boys and Bev all filed up the stairs and past the two smiling girls, Eddie coming up last and that Ivy girl falling into step right behind him. As they made their way to the kitchen, she brushed a hand against his shoulder. “Nice jacket; you like Hendrix?” She asked, smiling over at him, and she looked so soft and warm and sweet as sugar rock candy that he had to clear his throat before he could answer her.

“Yeah, love him,” He choked out, knowing full well he had only ever heard the songs Richie had played in the car with him against his will.

She smiled wider now, nodding as she set a tray of pink and yellow cupcakes down on the Uris family dinner table. “My dad used to play his stuff in the house all the time,” She said, but then Sara was tugging on her arm and Stan was getting everyone’s attention to lay down some ground rules because Bill and Richie just walked in and there were even more girls waiting in the kitchen (girls Eddie recognized from the hall earlier but couldn’t put names to) and Eddie nervously rubbed the Jimi Hendrix patch on the shoulder of his borrowed jacket, feeling a lot cooler than when Stan had pulled it out and he had thought it looked like something a stoner girl Richie would know might wear.

While Stan talked, he noticed Richie staring at the pale white choker that wrapped around Ivy’s neck. Eddie found himself staring at it too, thinking that if he were a guy like Richie he would tear it off her with his teeth in the backseat of someone else’s car. A shiver ran down his spine. He pulled his sleeves down over his hands and told himself he didn’t know why his palms began to sweat.

3. Interesting

Ben had always been more of an observer than anything else. Being with the Losers felt like a losing race sometimes, each of them fighting to include the other six in whatever they were doing. Before you knew it, Richie would have you smoking one of his cheap cigarettes while Bill and Mike interrogated you about your favorite albums and Eddie and Stan argued back with them like “ *Come on, you don’t really like Nirvana that much, do you, Benny? They’re so overrated. Kurt Cobain ain’t got shit on New Kids on the Block and we all know it!*” Bev was always different, though. At least, with Ben she was.

While all the boys were loud and mostly obnoxious and gave Ben a great show, Beverly Marsh had always been different. The boys were something wild, a scene from a Monty Python movie. Bev was something softer, quieter, an ancient book of poetry written in a language Ben had only so far half-learned. In short, Bev had always been able to do something the boys couldn’t. While they had to use tricks she didn’t - talking too loud and asking too many questions and giving him gifts he didn’t ask for but still appreciated - to lure him out from behind the rose-colored glasses he liked to sit back and watch with, all Bevvie had to do was lay a single finger on him, and the boy was gone.

From two rooms over, Chubby Checker played on the new sound system Stan’s mother had forced her husband to buy, and a Motley Crue of 90’s kids sipped their drinks and shook their hips. If Ben had been watching them, he would have been very bored, none of them really enjoying themselves as they stood too close and barely danced. He wasn’t watching them, though. He was in Stan’s parents’ bathroom, Beverly on her tiptoes searching through the cupboards beside him as he watched her patiently. A Simon & Garfunkel song came on, something he remembered from Bev playing it in her room when they used to study together, years ago. Right after Bill, when she couldn’t help but cry on Ben’s shoulder to The Beatles and make him swear not to tell the other boys. Bev suddenly looked back at him. He gave her the courtesy of looking away.

“Here’s to you, Mrs. Robinson. Jesus loves you more than you will know...”

Ben cleared his throat. “You found what you needed?”

Beverly smiled kindly back at him, screwing off the lid of a bright green jar and sticking her fingers inside. The gel she scooped out was clear and slimy, but Ben’s breath still caught when she drew closer to run it through his hair, her legs small and delicate between his larger thighs, her nails scratching his head gently. “Yep, now- Hey, stand still, dummy!” She warned as he tilted his head into her hands and got a glob of the sticky, slimy gel on his forehead. He gave her an apologetic look, and she eventually smiled as she wiped it off him.

They stood that way for a moment, so close, her hands in his hair, the heat from her body warming Ben’s right side, and when she stepped away he knew he would feel the absence of it there, the hole she had left in his perception. Ben thought about a lot of things as he watched the freckles on the bridge of her nose crinkle together in concentration. Most of them he would never repeat, more out of fear than embarrassment itself.

Beverly wasn’t just a mystery to the boys. She was often a mystery to herself. Now, in a strange Jewish couple’s bathroom, she ignored the elephant in the room (or the blood on the walls) as she had learned to. She didn’t let herself think about how Ben’s hands on the edge of the counter were so *big*, so much bigger than Bill’s, mostly because it made her sick to think about Bill too long sometimes, especially when she was with Ben. She didn’t pucker her lips and place a gentle kiss against his cheek as their cheeks brushed when she leaned forward to check the back of his head in the mirror. And when she backed away from him, hands shaking as she washed the over-priced gel off them, she didn’t tell Ben that he looked so much better now than he ever had before, with one of her favorite songs played in the background and a jacket around his shoulders that made him look a way she didn’t think he ever had before: *really, really cool*.

“It’s no James Dean, but it’s the best I could do,” She said, quieter than she had intended. Ben always had this way of turning all her words into whispers, every sentence into a secret.

Ben turned to look in the mirror and shook his head slowly, thinking for the first time in his whole life that he looked alright standing next to a girl like Beverly Marsh. “It’s perfect, Bevvie.”

They both paused for a moment to still their racing hearts. “Sweet Caroline” switched on. Through the door, Stan screamed in excitement, the sound of it barely muffled as it hit their ears, and they laughed together.

“You wanna go dance, sweet boy?” Bev asked, holding out a hand for Ben to take.

Tell her you love the way that sounds in her mouth, even if it started because Richie was making fun of you for being so fat and teaching the others how to steal extra candy from all the houses on Halloween, Ben thought to himself. Tell her you'll always be here dance with her. Tell her she's the only girl you'll ever dance with. Tell her you'd dance with her anywhere, in front of anyone, everyone in the world.

He placed his hand in hers.

“Only if you don’t step on my feet this time.”

“Brown Eyed Girl” had just started to play as Richie tore himself away from a conversation with Eddie and Bill to top off his drink with more whiskey than Coke. Almost everyone was in the living room pretending to dance. Everyone, that is, except (*my man*, Richie thought) Mike Hanlon.

Mike smiled when he saw Richie and raised his cup to him. Richie grinned back. “Mike Hanlon, *my man!* What are you doing hiding from the party? I’d think it’d be Ben,” He mused, sticking his head in the fridge and pulling out a bottle of soda. “Where is old Benny, by the way?”

Mike just shrugged. “Hiding somewhere else, apparently,” he said, taking a sip of his drink as Richie reached for the Jack Daniel’s they had all made Bev pay for, since she normally drank it all anyway.

“So, what are you doing in here, then?”

Mike smiled back at him. “People watching,” He said, nodding ahead of him to the sliver of the party that was still visible from his spot by the stove.

Richie rolled his eyes. “I will never understand you, Mikey. *People watching?* You’re like a serial killer, seriously,” he said, mixing the drink with the crazy straws he knew Eddie had bought and laid out beside the alcohol. He didn’t even look back at Mike until the other boy was laughing and shaking his head. “I wouldn’t be surprised if you- Hey! Bitch!” He called, catching on to the fact that the other boy was laughing at *him* . “I’ll beat your ass, you prick!” He pretended to rage, grabbing the other boy in a headlock and rubbing his knuckles against his head. Mike shoved him off after a moment.

“Look,” he said simply, motioning ahead of him, and Richie turned on his heels and immediately had to fight a smile. Sara Hoskins, the Marty to Mike’s Sonny, was dancing with another girl, who Richie assumed must have been their Jan. She shook her hips relentlessly, not skipping a beat, and threw her head back on her shoulder as she did so. Her breasts bounced with each step she took. Richie nodded.

“Okay, I lied. I understand you completely, Michael.” Mike just shrugged and smiled back. “Where’s, uh...” Richie tried very hard to not sound desperate as he spoke his next sentence. “Where’s that Ivy chick?”

Mike grinned wider, if it was possible. “Outside,” he said, and then added, quieter, like it was some big secret he had sworn not to tell, “Smoking.”

Richie laughed. “You’re kidding?”

“Not cigarettes, either,” Mike clarified, and Richie’s jaw almost dropped.

“You’re kidding! Why didn’t you tell me, man?” The taller boy complained, running his hands through his unruly, too long hair, biting back the question he would have asked Bill or Eddie maybe but never Mike. *Your hair looks fine, dipshit. Go fucking get her*, he thought to himself. And just like that, he did, waving to Mike and ducking out the front door of Stan’s place, the music fading into

almost silence behind him.

And there she was. Leaning against the railing that surrounded Stanley's front porch, raising a well-rolled joint to her lips, blonde hair blowing in the night wind like something from a fucking movie. *Your hair looks fine*, Richie assured himself as he walked up to her. *Just tell her hello and say something nice about her shoes or some shit. She's just a goddamn girl.* But before he could speak, the girl standing before him laughed, shifting her weight back and looking Richie's way.

“You’re my Danny, right?” She asked, clear eyes staring right into his, and Richie felt like an idiot as he answered her, his mouth suddenly dry.

“Ye-yeah. Sure am.”

She laughed again, and Richie was mad at himself for being laughed at so many times in so few minutes. After she was done, she just stared at him for a long moment, blowing smoke past her lips, and Richie stared back, nervous for the first time in months, his fingers drumming against his thighs, morse code for F-U-C-K. “Interesting.”

“What does that mean?” Richie couldn’t stop himself from asking, curiosity and indignation clear in his voice, and she laughed again. “And stop laughing at me, girl,” he added quickly, leaning against the rail beside her. She looked over at him, clearly still amused.

“What do you think it means?” Ivy asked back. When Richie couldn’t find an answer, she held out the joint to him, and he took it, watching her as she turned and stared back down the street.

Richie laughed through a cough after he took a hit, passing it back to her. It was quiet between them for another moment. She gave the joint back to him, and their fingers brushed. The feeling made the hair on the back of his neck stand up. He cursed himself for being such a *sucker* for chicks. He always had been. “Richie Tozier,” he introduced him abruptly, the smoke in his lungs making his voice come out tight and strained. “Known aliases include ‘Trashmouth,’ ‘Bucky Beaver,’ and ‘That Piece of Shit From Math Class.’”

She laughed again. “Ivy Evans. Often referred to as ‘That One Girl From Theater.’” She paused here. “Or ‘The Girl of Your Dreams.’ Either one, really.” Richie looked back at her, surprised by that one. She looked away. “And I hope those nicknames don’t stem from any underlying hygiene issues because in case you haven’t heard...” She leaned in close to him, smiling softly. “We have to *kiss*. ”

Richie swallowed hard before responding. “I assure you they don’t, my lady,” he replied, his voice taking on a deeper tone and a half-British accent. She giggled beside him, the sound ringing like applause in his ears. “Only from what mother dear calls my ‘big mouth.’” She laughed again. He grinned and leaned in, dropping the accent. “And, for future reference, most *every part of me* is big, not just the mouth, if you know what I-”

“Shh!” Ivy stopped him short, pressing a soft, manicured hand against his chest. It was quiet for a minute between them. She stared inside the window to their left, listening closely, and then hopped up suddenly, throwing the joint she had down and stepping on it. “That’s my favorite song. We gotta dance.”

“Dance?” Richie repeated, his voice sounding very small and unsure, and she laughed at him. Again. He was getting used to the sound of it.

She smiled over her shoulder at him. “You betcha, Danny.”

Holding out a hand behind her, she stepped toward the door. Unlike Ben, Richie didn’t think a single thing before he took it, rushing along behind her, not stopping to wonder what she had meant by ‘interesting’ or why she loved this song so much she just *had* to dance to it with *him*. He just took her hand and followed her inside, grabbing Mike on the way, and that was how Richie learned how to really *dance* like a 1960’s teenager, all elbows and ankles, with a pretty blonde girl leading him all the way along and his best friends around him, each of them watching, loving, laughing at him too (but now it was the good kind of laugh, the laugh Richie lived for, the one that meant they liked him, they *really liked him*). Ivy kicked her legs and pressed her chest against his when the song ended, both of their lungs fighting for air, nervous electricity absolutely humming through their veins.

“Pretty interesting,” she had laughed out once they caught their breath. “Pretty interesting, Trashmouth.”

Richie smiled as she walked away, swinging her hips, his chest feeling very cold without her pressed up against it. “I still don't know what that means!”

4. The Cute One

“So, you’re Eddie, right?”

And up until that moment Eddie hadn’t spoken to any of the girls there, not since his short conversation with Ivy, and he was beginning to be proud of it. It was so *strange*, though. Eddie liked parties, and he thought he liked girls too, but he found himself talking like Richie would when they were younger, when Bill or Mike would get girlfriends or Bev would have one of her friends from school tag along with them. *Seven. Not eight or nine or fucking ten. Seven*, he used to say. *It’s perfect. It’s the lucky goddamn number, losers! You really wanna fuck that up?* No one listened to Richie then, thinking he was just being an ass, and no one would have listened to Eddie if he had said something now, bound to think exactly the same about him. So, while all his friends talked and dance with girls he didn’t want to meet, he hung out in the corner near Bill and Stan, though they were busying themselves with bad jokes and shots, Bill clearly the aggressor but Stan happy to follow him. He took sips of what was now lukewarm beer and listened to all the songs he didn’t like, tried not to cringe when somebody played “Grease” and everyone started screaming. He was happy right then, right there, pleased to be displeased with his current surroundings. But then the girl tapped his shoulder.

Eddie looked back at her. She was a taller girl than the others he had seen. She had bangs cut just before kind-looking grey eyes and a smile like Mona Lisa, only half-happy. Her nose was so capital ‘J’ Jewish it made Eddie think of all those horrible jokes he and Richie used to say about Stan. She was pretty, though. They were all pretty. Eddie faked a half-smile at her. “Yep, sure am.”

The girl grinned wider now, a real smile. Eddie thought this one looked better on her. “Oh, nice! I’m Hannah. Goldberg. Or Jan, I guess.” She held out her hand for him to shake.

He took it. “Nice to meet you,” he said, and then, after a beat of silence, turned the other way again.

Hannah only paused for a minute before saddling up beside him.

“You’re not a people person, huh?” She asked him, eyes wide, genuinely curious.

Eddie tried not to sound offended. “Not really. I’m just not quite... not really a party person, you know?” But that was a lie. Eddie wasn’t a ‘party with girls he doesn’t know because they’re in the same dumb musical he’s in even though he hates musicals in the first place’ person. But that would’ve been hard to explain.

The girl sipped her drink slowly. “Yeah, I get that, I guess.” It was quiet for a minute. Eddie thought he ought to say something but couldn’t come up with anything before she spoke again, flipping a long piece of brown hair over her shoulder. “So, okay, let’s be real. I really just need you to tell me who all of these people are because so far I’ve talked to three boys and a redhead and I know none of their names.” She looked over at him nervously.

Eddie laughed. *Fuck it*, he thought to himself. *If I have to talk to one of them, I’d rather it be the nice Jewish girl than the Hendrix-loving blonde anyway. At least she doesn’t make my knees shake.* “Okay, well, uh...” Eddie pointed to the doorway, starting from the farthest away from him. Mike leaned against the doorframe, trying to look cool and maybe succeeding as a dark haired girl laughed at something he said. “That’s Mike Hanlon. He’s our farm boy.”

Hannah laughed, bending over a bit in the process. “Farm boy?”

He didn’t have to stop himself from smiling, not sure if it was the girl’s laugh or talking about his friends that cheered him up. “Yep. Farm boy. Raises all kinds of animals - cows and horses and sheep and chickens. All kinds of shit. He used to wear overalls all the time too before Bill turned us all into greasers.”

The girl tossed her hair over her shoulder again. Eddie wondered if it was a nervous tick, like Richie’s ever-moving hands or what was left of Bill’s stutter. “Bill?” She asked, although Eddie was sure she had heard of him.

He lowered his voice and motioned just beside them, to two tall boys tapping their drink against each other and tipping them back. A girl cheered. “The dark haired one’s Bill Denbrough. We call him Big

Bill. He's the one who got us all into *Grease* in the first place. He, uh—" Eddie suddenly realized it was harder to describe who Bill *was* to them really, because he was almost *everything* to them all at once. He cleared his throat. "He's our Danny, really. Our, um... I mean, it's hard to explain..."

"He's your leader," Hannah said simply, and Eddie nodded.

"Yeah. He is."

She nodded. "And who's the cute one?" She said, looking to her left. Eddie looked over and saw that Richie had joined Stan and Bill, pouring the three of them a shot as Stan raised his hands and told him 'you know what, maybe I *don't* need another one.' Eddie's face burned red.

"Oh, um, that's Richie. He's—"

"No," Hannah corrected him, eyebrows knitting together. "Not him; I had Biology with *him*. I know him. Who's the *cute one*?" Eddie looked over at her, confused, and followed her pointer finger to Stan as he took a shot and his face screwed up in disgust. "Him."

"Oh," Eddie said, and he felt the nervousness building in his chest. *Why, oh good Lord fucking why would he say Richie? Richie wasn't- He's not even-* "That's Stan Uris. Stan the Man. He, um, well I don't know, Stan's just..." He paused for a moment, then looked back to her. "You think he's cute?"

Hannah shrugged and sipped her drink, hiding her face from him. "I mean, yeah. A little."

It was quiet for a moment. "Stan used to be a boy scout. Maybe he still is, I don't know. Is there like an age restriction on that shit?" He paused to let her giggle a bit. "Likes bird watching and crosswords and stuff like that. Always listens to Barbra Streisand before he goes to sleep."

That set Hannah off, and it took her several minutes to stop laughing. "Streisand? Really?"

"Swear to God."

He didn't think to stop himself from smiling as he pointed to Ben and Bev standing in a corner by the hallway, talking to that Ivy girl from earlier. "And that's Ben and Bev. Ben is cool; he's a little quiet sometimes, but he's really fun when he wants to be. He's like that guy who *reads for fun* and stuff. Always uses big words no one understands. And that," he nodded to Bev as she spun in place to the song that was playing, her long legs twisting around each other in a way that Eddie could only ever describe as *pretty*. "That's Beverly Marsh. She's our real life Rizzo. Just an all-around badass, really."

"I heard she punched Troy Connor in the face when he asked her for her number."

Eddie nodded, his lips twisting with 'well... yeah.' "That's Bev for ya."

"Cool," Hannah said simply, then pointed to the blonde girl next to Ben, who was currently showing Bev a new dance move Eddie hadn't seen anywhere *but* in horrible musicals like *Grease*. "That's Ivy Evans. She just moved here from Baltimore last year, but she's really cool. A lot of girls hate her because she looks like that-"

"Like what?" Eddie asked, unsure, and Hannah didn't skip a beat.

"Pretty," she said, looking over at Eddie. She seemed confused as to why he even had to ask. Eddie didn't say anything back. "Anyway, she can dance really well, and she's really funny." Hannah's voice dropped a bit. "She smokes *pot*," She said, the last word so low Eddie barely heard it.

"So do Bill and Richie," Eddie said, laughing a bit.

"Oh, nice. Well, um, the redhead in the corner over there is Jamie. She doesn't like parties either, but she came because we all were and she didn't wanna be alone at home. She's a little quiet, and she reads and studies a lot too like that Ben kid, but she can talk her way out of anything. One time Sara got caught smoking cigarettes in the parking lot and Jamie got her out of it."

Eddie shook his head. "How'd she do that?"

Hannah shrugged. “No idea. She’s a genius, I’m pretty sure.”

Then she pointed to the girl who now had her hand on Mike’s chest. “And that’s Sara.” She paused before describing her, looking at her the way Eddie hoped he didn’t look at Richie. “She’s the coolest of all of us. Like if Judd Nelson from *The Breakfast Club* was a girl. She gets us into all the trouble most of the time, but it’s okay.”

The boy nodded beside her. “Sounds like Richie.”

Hannah laughed and nodded. “Yeah, a little, I guess.”

It was quiet again between them for the first time in minutes, and Eddie let himself soak in it, sipping slowly from his now almost-empty drink.

“So, what do *you* like?”

That one caught Eddie off guard, and he swallowed hard, looking around the party, trying to think. What *did* he like? He was barely even sure anymore. His eyes flickered to Richie and then back away. *I can’t believe I actually thought he was ‘the cute one,’* he thought, annoyed with himself. “Um, I don’t know...” And if it were another girl, maybe that would be enough, but Hannah kept looking to him expectantly, and he bit his lip as he tried to come up with something else.

“Them, mostly.”

5. A Great Guy

Mike Hanlon was pretty okay with old people. Mike was good with kids. He was fucking *fantastic* with animals.

But girls?

Sara Hoskins had been playing a game of “How close is too close?” with him since she had caught him looking her way almost an hour ago. Currently, her soft, delicate hand wrapped around his bicep, porcelain skin contrasting with the black of Stan’s dad’s jacket in a way that Mike felt looked *just right* in some way, and his collar was just starting to loosen on the lump in his throat when she leaned her head against his shoulder.

Mike was *clueless* when it came to girls.

He smiled down at her as she batted her eyes up at him and took a long gulp from the cup in his other hand. She waited patiently for him to return his attention to her upturned face.

It wasn’t his fault. He didn’t have a father or brothers to teach him how to flirt with girls or get a date or not lose your whole shit when they touched you. (And God, every time this girl touched him it felt like wildfire, like an absolute nightmare, and she was so damn *pretty* he was almost mad at her for it.) All Mike had were the boys, and Ben, Eddie, and Stan would be no help. Stan had only ever liked one girl as far as Mike knew (an Asian girl who sat behind him in ninth grade English), and to this day, he had never spoken more than a few words to her. Ben had been desperately in love with Beverly since he came out his mother it seemed, but he still didn’t have the balls to tell her that, even after so many years. And Eddie... Mike let his mind trail off here. It seemed mean to think the things he thought about Eddie, though he didn’t *mean* for them to be mean. If he ever said it out loud though, he knew Bill and Richie would both fight him over it. (It had just occurred to Mike only months ago that Eddie might be *not straight*, and he had silently been keeping track of how many times Eddie stared at girls and how many times Eddie stared at boys, mostly Richie. The results only made him feel bad for even counting, for caring so much to speculate about his best friend’s maybe-not-

straightness. It didn't matter anyway.)

Mike returned his gaze to Sara after he had downed the remainder of his drink. Her eyes sparkled when he looked at her. He actually choked a bit. "Have you ever had a girlfriend before, Mike Hanlon?" She asked, her hand squeezing against the muscles he had out of necessity more than aesthetics.

Bill and Richie could've helped him. Richie hadn't had many girlfriends, but he had been on plenty of dates and made out with plenty of girls at parties. He didn't know a lot, and Mike had known him long enough to know that girls threw him off his game more often than not, but at least he had experience. And Bill? Bill Denbrough had everyone in love with him, especially girls. He hadn't had too many girlfriends either, but Mike also couldn't remember a time Bill said he liked a girl and didn't get her to date him within a week.

In short, there were about two people in the whole world that could've helped keep Mike from sweating like a stuck pig right now. And they both hadn't told him a god damn thing.

Mike forced out a laugh. *What would Bill or Richie say? What would Ben think about saying?* "No girls like you, Sara Hoskins," he replied, trying his very hardest to sound cool, and maybe it worked because Sara looked away and giggled at that. The sound of her laugh made a panic rise in Mike's chest. He cleared his throat. "I'll be right back," he told her quickly before ducking off down the hall, deciding he had to hide somewhere and catch his breath.

Stan's door was locked (of course), as was his bathroom, but his parents' bedroom door was open just a crack. Mike stepped inside. The bathroom light was on, breaking through and casting long shadows along the carpet, but the door was shut. He should have knocked first (looking back, *of course* he should have knocked first), but Mike Hanlon swung open the door with no hesitation, nervous energy pulsing through his veins, the image of a busty girl in a bright red shirt smiling up at him burning in the back of his mind.

Mike only looked for a moment, just long enough to take in the scene before him, before slamming the door shut again. Beverly

Marsh sat on the counter by the sink, her head leaned back against the mirror behind her, while Bill Denbrough's long, lanky boy eclipsed hers, hands just above her knees, kissing her as she wound her hands in his hair. "Okay!" Mike said quickly once the door had shut back, his heart only racing harder. "Didn't see a thing! Not a problem! I'll just use the other bathroom!"

Bill let out a huff as Bev pushed his face away from hers. He pressed his ear against her chest, listening to her heart race as she panted above him, trying to catch her breath. He could still taste the whiskey on his tongue, left there by her own. Her hair, which she had decided to grow out like a 'real girl' last year, hung in twisted waves by his face. It smelled like coconut and lemon. She drew away from him, sighing, and without a word he knew it was over.

He moved his hands from her thighs to the counter beside them and drew back from her, too. She leaned away from him, against the mirror behind her. Bill looked off, around the room for a moment, scared to meet her eyes.

When he looked back, she had her head in her hands.

"W-wa-wait, no," he said, the words an instinct more than a choice, his hands reaching out to touch her face. "D-don't cry, B-B-Bevvie."

"Shut up, you stuttering idiot," she choked out, and they were mean words, but, drunkenly, Bill smiled and thought they sounded sweet coming from her lips. "I'm just drunk."

She placed a hand over his on her face and met his eyes. Bill felt his chest rise and fall painfully, afraid to do anything but stare back at her. She looked away, down at her lap. Bill swallowed, hard. "We d-d-don't," but Bev gave him a look that said 'if you start stuttering like you used to I'm gonna cry so much more' and he closed his eyes, breathing deep until he could speak clearly again. "We don't have to do... anything, you know, if you don't want t-to."

She looked back at him, and her eyes looked so upset, so *scared*. He tried not to be scared himself, like she was just any other girl, like

she was anyone but his Beverly. “Do you want to?”

Bill started to answer but then thought better of it, pausing for another moment. “I w-want to kiss you and it not make you cry.”

Beverly wiped a tear from her cheek. “I’m not crying,” she said now, her voice back to where it should’ve been. She didn’t sniffle or sob; she never did.

This was the fourth time she had cried after they had kissed. The first had been Ben’s birthday in November, when he took her home last and kissed her as she sat passenger in Silver and didn’t realize she was crying until the tears wet his own cheeks. She didn’t pull away from him that time until they dried. The next time, months later, she had pulled away from his roaming hands and rough lips to wet his new t-shirt with mascara stains he still didn’t have the nerve to wash out. And the last time, just two weeks ago, she had broke down while Bill was kissing her neck, and when he looked up and saw her crying, he had almost had a heart attack.

All four she had been drunk, although the first time he wasn’t, instead just stoned and hopeful. She didn’t know that.

Bev was quiet for a long time, staring back at him, knowing what she thought she had wanted to say but not wanting to say it. *We should stop*, she had told herself she’d tell him. *We should quit this. It just makes me feel even worse, and it makes you think I’m still in love with you, and maybe I am, but it’s only a matter of time before Ben is the one opening that door and I have to explain to all three of us why I’m kissing you in Stan’s parents’ bathroom.*

“You’re a great guy, Big Bill,” she told him, staring right in his eyes, and held back the other words racing through her head. *But you’re not my guy.*

Bill smiled back and pretended she had said fewer, more satisfying words, words that floated off the tongue more lightly, words that you said to a lover, not a friend. “You’re a g-great guy too, Bevvie.”

And she laughed. That night, Bill would lie on the right side of Stan’s bed, Richie and Eddie on the floor beside him, Mike and Ben

and Bev piled up in Stan's parents' bed, his head swimming and pounding at the same time, and he would remember that laugh. It echoed in his ears until he fell asleep, and he even thought he heard it as he woke up the next morning, Stan's curly head buried into his chest, the way girls did when they had bad dreams. Bill rubbed Stan's back, his hands gently shaking, until the other boy woke up, eyes squinting at the sunlight beating down on them. "You're a great guy, Stan," Bill whispered to him, and then he heard Richie chuckle from the floor.

"*You're a great guy, Eddie,*" Richie cooed to the smaller boy beside him, and Eddie laughed, too loud.

"Oh, no, *you're* a great guy, Rich!" He squealed back, and then blushed when Richie made kissing noises at him and pinched his cheek.

"Next time I wake up it better not be to anything gay," Richie mumbled after, shoving his head back into his pillow. Bill and Stan laughed. Eddie didn't.

6. April 8th, 1994

Stanley Uris and Beverly Marsh had had every class together since eighth grade. They had shared sweaters and homework and Halloween candy (and Bill, they all shared Bill) so many times they had lost count. Stan was the first boy Beverly cuddled with, the one who taught her that boys could be as gentle and soft as girls.

Mike Hanlon had been Beverly Marsh's date to four homecoming dances, three winter formals, and (soon to be) two proms. No matter how ridiculous and loud she got when she was drunk, Mike was always the one who was there to hold her hair back as she puked. He was the first boy she ever really trusted, the one she had first cried in front of and then punched his shoulder, making him swear not to tell the others (by now, she had done this to each of them).

Eddie Kaspbrak had been Beverly's science partner for three years now. He was gentle in a different way, a separate way from Stan. (Stan was soft because he wanted to be; Eddie was soft because it was his nature, him at his most comfortable.) Eddie was the only boy out of the Losers she hadn't ever kissed, either on a dare or in a sewer, the one she fought Mary Daniels over in 10th grade, the one she felt she needed to protect the most.

Richie Tozier had spent more nights sleeping in Beverly Marsh's bathtub than in his own bed over the past four years. (Although, the same could be said for the other's guest bedrooms or floors or Eddie's own mattress.) Whenever Beverly bought a pack of cigarettes from Bill, she always flipped seven over for Richie, knowing he wouldn't have money to buy his own. He was the first boy to really take her breath away, in all respects - when he made her laugh so hard she couldn't breathe, when he pulled her into his signature bear hugs, squeezing the air from her lungs, and when they would smoke together, when the weed first hit him, he would tilt his head back and stare up at the ceiling and Bev would think that Richie really could be an actor or a comedian or an *anything he wanted* with a face like that.

Big Bill Denbrough had kissed Beverly Marsh at least once a month for over five years now, most months more. Every party Bill had, he

would ask Beverly to go with a nervous look on his face, as if she would ever say no to him. Bill was her first boyfriend, the first boy she was ever truly in love with, the one who taught her (and the other Losers, probably) that boys were worth loving.

But if you were to ask Beverly Marsh who her best friend was, who her favorite of them all was, she would say Ben Hanscom. Ben was so different from the others, so quiet and calm and relaxing, strong in a way that was peaceful, in so many ways different from every other boy she had known. Ben wrote poetry on bathroom stalls. He whispered Shakespeare to her some nights until she fell asleep. Ben had the softest hands of any boy she'd ever known, and she dreamt sometimes of waking up with them resting on her naked hips. He made her breath catch sometimes just by how quiet he could be, how easily he could sit back and just listen to her voice, to her lungs gasping for air, to her heartbeat racing, all because of him.

“Who you daydreamin’ about, dahlin’?” Richie said to her, his voice a mockery of an accent from *Gone With The Wind*. Bev rolled her eyes at the sound.

“Wouldn’t you like to know?”

Richie just grinned at her, leaning back in his seat until his hair brushed against her knee and taking a hit from the cigarette he held like a joint. They were in Bills truck skipping their last class (*when weren’t they in Bill’s truck?*) with Bill sitting behind the wheel and Richie passenger, just like usual. Beverly sat behind Richie, her legs kicked up on the console next to him, and Stan was on her far left, still holding the sign-out slip his mother had written and forgot to date weeks ago. Bev knew he was nervous by the look on his face, the way his hand would shake when he lifted his cigarette to his lips, but the thought made her smile. It was cute, that he got so worried about getting in trouble. Refreshing. The *Grease* theme song played quietly in the background. It was April 8th.

“Wish we could smoke fuckin’ pot at school...” Bill muttered, staring out his window, watching for teachers as he puffed on a Marlboro menthol. Beverly took a drag from her own. The mint made her lips tingle. Refreshing.

“Me too, Bill,” Bev replied, and Richie sat up again, tapping his window with a knuckle.

“Squares at 2 o’clock,” he said simply, and Stan whipped his head around to look. A small, brunette boy in a pink sweater held his books in his arms as he approached with two girls, a long-legged brown-haired girl in a blue dress and a blonde with braids in jeans and a white blouse. As they got closer, Stan saw a fanny pack around the boy’s waist and rolled his eyes, shoving Richie’s arm.

“That’s Eddie, you dumbass.”

Richie’s head whipped around now. “Huh?” Beverly laughed at his confusion and looked out her own window at them as they approached the truck. *They did look like squares*, she thought, smiling to herself. Richie rolled down his window. “Eddie Spaghetti, where in Sam Hell did you get that sweater?” He called, using the same horrid Southern accent as he had with Bev before, and Bill broke down laughing beside him. Bev kicked the back of his chair.

“Stop it with that voice, you idiot!” She screamed. The blonde girl outside laughed at that. Now that she was closer, Beverly recognized her as Ivy and the girl beside her as Hannah, from the musical. Friday, surprisingly, was the only day they didn’t have rehearsals, all of the Losers’ free time through the week taken up by studying and reading their line. She quickly opened her door. “What are you Pink Ladies doing all the way over here?” Smoke billowed out of the open door. Hannah lifted herself up on her tiptoes to look inside.

“*Pink Ladies* is right, huh, Eds?” Richie called, but as he reached out to tug on his sweater and Eddie pushed him away angrily, Beverly saw him sneak a glance at Ivy’s chest in her shirt. *Trashmouth*, she thought to herself, biting back her annoyance.

“We got to Sara’s car to ride home,” Ivy started, then paused and pointed to Richie’s cigarette. Eddie was tucked behind the mirror on the outside of the cab, avoiding the smoke it was putting off. “Is that a menthol?” She asked, and he nodded. She smiled back. “Can I... have it?”

The rest of them laughed as he handed it to her and she took a long

drag, blowing the smoke up to the sky. “Thanks. Okay, so we got to Sara’s car and her, Mike, Jamie, her little sister, and- What’s his name?”

Don’t say Ben, Beverly thought to herself, but it was too late, because Hannah had already replied, kicking her heels against the concrete beneath them.

“Ben.”

Ivy nodded. “Right, shit. Ben. They’re all piled up in the thing, and they tell us we’re supposed to ride with you guys and meet them wherever you guys always go after school, but we didn’t know where you guys were parked, so we had to wait in the nurse’s office until Eddie could leave.”

Richie was lighting up a new cigarette for himself. “And the sweater?” He asked around the stick in his mouth, and Eddie stomped one of his feet.

“Will you shut up about the sweater, you dick?”

“It’s mine. He said he got cold so I got it for him out of my locker,” Hannah said.

“A girl’s pink sweater?” He asked, eyes wide, and Bill cracked up again beside him. “Eddie Kaspbrak - Ladies’ Man of Derry High!”

When Bill had regained his composure, he leaned toward Richie’s open window, looking out at the girls. “So how are you two planning on riding?” He asked, and the two of them shared a look, confused.

Beverly decided to explain it to them, since Richie and Bill would only confuse them more and Stan still hadn’t paid any attention to any of them, puffing away on his cigarette in silence. “I usually have to ride in Ben’s lap, and Mike and Eddie sit beside us, and Stan sits up front between the boys-”

Richie cut her off, blowing his smoke in Bill’s face with a huff (Bev figured this was so he didn’t blow it at Eddie, but it drifted out the window anyway, and Eddie’s face screwed up in disgust). “How about Stan and Hannah sit up front, and you,” he pointed at Ivy. “Sit

in my lap?"

Ivy tilted her head to the side, trying to think it over, then turned to Eddie. "How about I sit in your lap?" She asked, and everyone else laughed so hard that Richie had shoved them into the backseat on top of each other within minutes.

Stan crawled out of the back seat to make room for Richie, Bev, and Ivy and Eddie in the middle, Ivy trying her hardest not to put too much of her weight on the boy. "I have to sit *bitch*?" Hannah asked, her voice sounding so innocent and funny saying the bad word that the others laughed over Stan putting a hand on her arm and ducking past her, taking the small seat himself. He smiled over at her after. She stared out the window until Bill cranked up the truck, her cheeks burning red and her skin still tingling where he had touched it.

"Stan sits *bitch* because he's the biggest *bitch* we know," Richie teased from the back seat. Stan shot him a glare over his shoulder and flicked him the bird.

Bill chuckled and shook his head. "Don't let him get you down, Stanley. I love when you sit *bitch*." They all laughed, Stan included, and then it was quiet for a minute. When they turned out of the parking lot, Bill stomped on the gas, the others screaming as his tires almost screeched. "Hi-ho, Silver!"

"Where are we going?" Ivy leaned back and asked Eddie after they pulled out of the school. "Mike and Ben said we were meeting up at you guys' normal spot, but—" She stopped to laugh, her breath washing over Eddie's neck. The small boy was very conscious of Richie beside him staring at the two of them, his legs bouncing as he sat. "I don't know where that is."

Eddie took a deep breath before he spoke, very nervous all of a sudden, her sitting sideways on his lap, his palms sweating at his sides, trying not to let his voice shake. "The quarry. You'll see," he assured her, and she nodded and turned back around. Richie elbowed his side and gave him a look. *Look at you, Eddie Spaghetti*, it said. *Cute girl in your lap*. Eddie was just glad she wasn't talking to him anymore.

Next to him, Beverly stared out the window, wondering if Ben was sitting next to the other redhead girl, if she smiled over at him and tried to convince him to smoke her cigarettes like Beverly did, if he wrapped his arms around her waist like he did hers. Of course, she was being silly. *I know that*, Beverly thought to herself. *But I'll kill her if she touches him*. And she took a drag from her cigarette, watching Derry fly past her as Silver carried them to the quarry. Her teeth bit at her bright red nails. *January embers*. She sighed. *I really will kill her*.

7. The Quarry

Ben Hanscom sat in the back of Sara Hoskins' blue Volkswagen, his fingers pulling at the hands of his jacket, as the minutes ticked by, each tick of the clock slower than the last. "I really cannot believe you talked me into this."

Mike Hanlon ran a hand over his head and closed his eyes in the passenger seat, feeling the 3:30 sunshine on his face as they both sat, waiting for Sara and Jamie to come back out from the house they were parked in front of. "Chill out. You'll get to see Bev in 10 minutes."

"Not the *point*, but thanks, Michael," Ben retorted, setting his jaw tight. *I could be seeing Bev now, but you had to bring me with you because you're too nervous to be around girls by yourself*, Ben said in his head. *But I need to chill out, I guess, right?*

"I really don't know why you're being like this, Ben. She's not your girlfriend."

Ben looked up at Mike before him. He had turned in his seat and was staring at the other boy as his eyes raised. Ben felt a shiver run down his spine. "Really? She's not? Anything else to say?" He huffed, crossing his arms over his chest. "Beep, beep, asshole," he muttered. Mike flinched away from the insult.

"Dude, stop. I'm not trying to fight," He said now, reaching out to touch Ben's arm, sincere. The other boy just cleared his throat and nodded. "I just... Listen. You get too upset about her. Just chill out for once. You don't have to be with her to have fun."

And Ben Hanscom did listen, and he thought about what Mike said for a long while after he said it. As the car neared the quarry, Mike giving Sara directions and Jamie sitting next to him in the back, singing along to TLC, Ben watched another girl's hair fly in the wind and decided that he just disagreed with Mike on this one. There was no glimmer of fire in the girl's eyes, no spark to set her locks ablaze, no warm glow in her cheeks. It wasn't the same without Beverly. He couldn't just 'have fun' without her.

Ben had always thought he was a hopeless romantic. Now, he was beginning to realize maybe he was only that way for Bev, maybe the poetry didn't sound so sweet if it wasn't written about her, maybe he didn't want to be Hamlet unless he had his Ophelia.

As they pulled up and parked next to Silver, he saw her sitting on Bill's tailgate, smoking as always, her ankles crossed over each other. She smiled when she saw him wave out his window at her. He had to try very hard to catch his breath before he got out of the car.

"Ben Hanscom," she greeted him, raising her cigarette as a 'cheers' and pressing a cold beer into his chest. It felt like an ice bath over his heart. He grabbed and opened it quickly, large fingers making quick work of the tab.

"Beverly Marsh," he said back and took a sip. It was cold and bitter and 40% foam. Bill and Eddie came around from the cab of the truck. Ben saw Ivy walk off with Richie beside her. Hannah was standing with Stan, leaning against Silver's hood. Beverly moved closer to Ben on the tailgate, just so their shoulders touched.

"I like your sweater, Eddie," Ben told the smaller boy happily.

Bill laughed. "Richie does too," he said, as Eddie pouted a bit beside him.

"Shut up," was all he replied.

At the front of the truck, Hannah looked at Stan with big eyes as he lit up another cigarette. "I don't know how you all smoke those things."

Stan laughed. "They're not that bad. At least not the menthols." He held the pack in his left hand and flipped it over his fingers, nervous. Stan didn't talk to girls often. "You wanna try one?"

The girl thought it over for a moment. "Um.... Sure, yeah, I guess," she replied timidly, and his fingers fumbled as he opened the pack and placed a single cigarette in her palm. She grabbed it like a joint, like Richie did. Stan smiled at it. "I don't- I don't have a-" She started, feeling in her pockets for a lighter.

Stan ripped one out of his back pocket and struck it for her, holding the flame between their faces. She leaned in and sucked, too hard. The flame caught on her cigarette, and for a moment they stood there, staring at each other in the red light, eyes wide and anxious, both of them dreaming about first kisses and prom dates. Then, Hannah coughed.

It wasn't a cute cough, but Stan thought it was cute anyway, laughing gently as she bent over and coughed hard, her lungs gasping for air. When she finally straightened up, he apologized. "Eddie doesn't like them either," he said, and she smiled a little at that, cheeks red from either lack of oxygen or lack of experience.

"They're okay," she said, taking another hit and coughing again, less this time. Stan knew she was only doing it to impress him. He thought with a smile that it had been a long time since he'd had a *girl* try to impress *him*. Maybe forever.

On the other end of the truck, Eddie leaned against the tailgate next to Bev. Quietly (but not quietly enough), he asked her if she had any pot. A voice spoke behind him, a voice he knew immediately, a voice he would know anywhere. "Eds, you little *stoner*!" Richie teased, ruffling a hand in the smaller boy's hair. "If you wanted to smoke, you should've just asked me."

Bev laughed and shoo'ed Richie away with one hand. The tall boy didn't move an inch. "Stop bullying Eddie, Trashmouth," she said, only half-joking.

"Oh come on, Bevvie! It's all fun and games!"

Richie had saddled himself over to her and threw an arm around her shoulders. She rolled her eyes at him and put her lips close to her ear. "There are girls around," she whispered to him, as Mike and Sara and the other redhead finally walked up.

Richie pulled a face and shook his head. "Eddie's got girls all over the place," Richie said, and Beverly laughed and told him to shut up. "No, I'm serious," he whispered to her, messing with a strand of auburn hair by her ear. "He got my girl to sit in his lap, didn't he?"

“Your girl?” Bev repeated, her tone indignant, but Sara spoke up before she could give Richie a lesson in possessive pronouns and why women were not his property.

“This place is nice,” she said, looking around her as Mike stood patiently at her side and the other redhead (*Jamie*, only Beverly thought of her as ‘the other redhead’) shoved her hands in her pockets. “Cozy.”

“You’re telling me,” Ivy replied, her eyes still roaming around the quarry, amazed by it all. There were lawn chairs and a coffee table on one side, a leather couch and an old two-seater swing on the other, and a cliff only a few yards away, dropping off into a beautiful basin of what she didn’t know yet was 50% sewer water. It looked amazing to her, like something straight out of Peter Pan. Richie had told her they had all been hanging out here since ‘89, that the cops had never shown up in five years, that he had convinced Mike and Stan to try to grow weed plants in the forest around them but they never sprouted.

Bill stuck his head inside his truck for a moment and came back out with six blankets. One for each of the girls: Bev shared hers with Ben, Hannah let Stan warm his hands under hers, Jamie sat in a lawn chair and draped hers around her legs, Sara wrapped Mike in the one she was given and grabbed a beer from the cooler, saying she wasn’t cold. Richie tried to get Ivy to share hers, but she only let him for a few minutes before wrapping herself up in a cocoon. Eddie and Bill shared the last one, Eddie shivering as he always did, a ball of fluff with no body heat. Bill put a hand on Eddie’s shoulder. He tried not to think about how that felt so different than when Ivy had touched him before.

8. The Owl

Bill knew he had drank too much. Everyone had split up into smaller groups, the eleven of them divided unevenly into pairs or threes, and Bill knew, before Stan even spoke to him, that he had drank too much. He had had eleven beers, four past what would get him ‘tipsy,’ and he was stumbling over his own feet just trying to stand still against the bed of his truck, watching his friends talk and flirt around him.

Mike and his girl had disappeared to her car for a cigarette break over a half hour ago, and Richie had told Bill that he wished he had a camera so he could show Mike later how much he and Sara fogged up the windows of that little blue thing. Richie himself was sitting with the blonde girl, both of them kicking their legs off the edge of the drop-off, smoking cigarettes and watching her every move. Ben and Bev and Stan were on a couch. Jamie looked asleep, wrapped up tight in blankets with her head on the table while Eddie and Hannah sat on the edge of it, looking to Richie and Ivy.

Stan had tapped Bill’s shoulder with gentle fingers and leaned in to tell him over the music bumping out of Silver’s speakers that he had heard an owl. “Do you wanna go find it?” He asked cautiously, and Bill had *definitely* drank too much. Stan stared up at him with his pretty, perfectly symmetrical face, his curls bouncing in the night wind, and Bill nodded. The other boy grinned. “Great, come on.”

And Stan had grabbed Bill’s hand. Maybe that’s where it started. The minute Stan’s fingers hit Bill’s, he felt that strange sexual electricity that teenage boys feel so often, and Bill *knew* he had drank too much. Stan didn’t look back at him once, walking silently and blindly into the forest surrounding them, and Bill didn’t mind, watching the wheels in the pretty boy’s mind turn slowly. The owl was louder than Bill expected, making him jump the first time he heard it.

Stan slowly led them in a large circle. His palm had begun to sweat against Bill’s. The lighter haired boy tried to let go, to wipe the moisture from his hands, but Bill held on tight. On one hand, he could barely walk, tripping over roots and tall grass every couple

seconds, and he needed Stan's hand in his to be his anchor, to hold him upright, to keep him from floating into space. On the other hand, Stan really did look *beautiful* under the moonlight, the freckles on his collarbones dancing in place, his eyes just a shade lighter than chocolate, warm and inviting, and Bill thought as his stomach twisted that *shit, I really did drink too much.*

Because right then, in that moment, as Stan found the tree the owl was sitting in and tapped his free hand against the bark, his cheeks still flushed from Bill's strong grip on his fingers, Bill felt more for Stan than he ever had for any girl. "Found it," he said, his neck craning up to look for the bird, and Bill's breath got stuck in his throat.

"Really?" He asked, his words slurred immensely, surprised but knowing he shouldn't have been, and Stan nodded again and pointed to a shadow on a limb.

"There," he said, and Bill looked upwards but couldn't see. Stan chuckled. "Here," he said, stepping behind the just-barely taller boy, and raised their interlocked fingers to point at the figure. Bill swayed, and Stan had to catch him around the waist to keep him from falling. His fingers accidentally shifted the fabric of Bill's shirt, and the boy's fingers hit his bare hip. Bill stared at Stan, his eyes wide, both terrified and brave in the same moment.

Stan quickly stepped away, leaning back against the trunk of the tree. "Sorry," he mumbled.

"Don't be."

They stood there, silent, staring at each other, until Bill got the nerve to say what he thought. He took a single step toward the other boy. "You know you're my f-favorite, right, Stan?"

Stan didn't skip a beat; Bill having told him (and all the other Losers) this on many occasions. "Yep," he answered simply, then continued. "You know you're drunk, right, Big Bill?"

Bill laughed and shook his head, taking another step forward. Stan spine shook against the bark, sure this was leading somewhere but

not sure where. “Yeah, I am,” he admitted, and the warmth and joy in his throat made Stan smile. “I’m drunk. But you’re always my favorite, even when I’m not drunk.”

Bill took another step. Then another. Now he was only inches from Stan, the night’s frost making his breath escape him like clouds of smoke that the other boy quickly inhaled, his heartbeat racing, his palm still wet against his best friend’s. Stan didn’t speak. He didn’t have to.

“You’re such a great guy, Stan,” Bill told him, and for the first time in his life, Stan realized he was being looked at beautifully, slowly, as if the boy before him was being careful to commit each aspect of him to memory. He had been looked at this way before, of course; he just hadn’t known it. Bill had looked at him the same way when he had woken him up the other morning, the curly headed boy’s face buried into the other’s chest. *A great guy.* Stan repeated the words in his head, knowing they meant something else entirely.

“You’re pretty,” Bill continued, his voice not slurring a bit, and Stan’s face ran red. He tried to look away to hide it. Bill caught his cheek in his free hand. “I mean it,” he assured the other boy, and Stan nodded slowly, his face burning.

“And you’re smart.” This one made Stan blush even more. “And you’re great at finding fucking owls—”

And Bill clearly meant to continue, but Stan was laughing, and Bill stopped to let him. After he was done, the taller boy realized he had forgotten all he meant to say, the warmth of Stan’s face on his palm and the security of their hands still intertwined knocking the air from his chest.

Stan tilted his chin up in Bill’s hand. “You make me feel like a girl,” Stan complained quietly, his voice almost a whisper.

His best friend smiled back. “What’s so bad about that?” Bill asked, and Stan opened his mouth to reply but didn’t get the chance to.

Bill kissed him, soft at first, their lips just barely touching, and Stan sighed into the other boy’s mouth, his fingers tightening their grip. It

was his first kiss.

An hour later, they were still there together, pressed up against the tree, Stan's hands under Bill's shirt and Bill's teeth scraping his neck, the owl long gone. Stan let out small whimpers whenever Bill pressed their hips together. It sounded like magic to him. And when they finally did part, Bill was the first to pull away, Stan still gasping and pressing gentle kisses to his lips as he tried to catch his breath, too enamored to let go completely. Bill stroked his thumb along Stan's cheekbone. *It wasn't worse or better than kissing girls*, Bill realized. *Just different. Harder. More important.*